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2004

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## Textile Exchange and Cultural and Gendered Cross-Dressing at Palmyra, Syria (100 BC—AD 272)

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### Introduction

For millennia, textiles have been utilized by human civilizations to define gendered identities as well as ethnic, religious, and political affiliations. Textiles have also been utilized as lucrative objects of trade and cross-cultural transference. As such, their appearance in societies foreign to their origin of manufacture presents an interesting study in the power of trade textiles to transform the very essence of gendered manifestations of identity and behavior within a society through an absorption and transformation of foreign clothing styles and textile motifs. Often, these “foreign styles” provide visual expressions of the gendered “other” as well as acting as social symbols of status associated with the “unique” and the “expensive.” Textile imports designated as “exotic” often provided a conduit free of previously constructed cultured gender constraints, thus allowing a society to explore a redefinition of roles associated with either “maleness” and “femaleness,” as well as providing for the expression of those redefined identities through textile costuming in new ways.



*Figure 1. Family funerary symposium grouping from the Tomb of Malku/Malko of the Southwest Necropolis, late second century A.D., Palmyra, Syria.*

Perhaps no ancient society utilized the influence of trade textiles to define identity and status with more eclectic creativeness than the entrepreneurial citizens of the Palmyrene Oasis of Tadmor, Syria (figure 1). Since at least the Neolithic Period, the Tadmor Oasis had served as an essential conduit of trade across the Northern Syrian Desert between the Mesopotamian civilizations of the Tigris-Euphrates River Valleys and the coastal outlets

of the Mediterranean Basin. Tadmor (later renamed Palmyra by the Romans) hosted not only the most important water resources in the region but also critical life sustaining reserves of salt. Its geographic location at the virtual center of the Syrian Desert in combination with its natural resources destined this relatively small oasis for eventual historic and economic greatness. It was during the Late Hellenistic and Early Roman eras that Palmyra fulfilled its pre-determined destiny and attained a golden age of prosperity based on its political and military position as both a buffer, but also a conduit between Roman imperial interests in Greater Syria, as well as Parthian, and later Sassanian Persian nationalistic expansion in the Near East. Thus, lying literally between East and West, the Aramaean and Arab tribal families of Palmyra developed an interesting process of cultural and gendered cross-dressing influenced by their involvement in the textile trade exchange that existed between the Gandharan regions of Western Asia and India, Persia, the Oriental empires in China, the Hellenized Near East, and the hungry and wealthy Greco-Roman consumers of the Mediterranean Basin.

This paper expands on past research related to Palmyrene costuming and presents totally new information concerning the utilization of trade textiles as a manifestation of gendered identities and cross-dressing at Palmyra.<sup>1</sup> While previous studies have discussed many of the essential costume variables manifested in the funerary portraits of Palmyra's entrepreneurial citizens (both male and female), this study will specifically discuss a few examples of gendered cross-dressing at Palmyra with their related social and cultural implications, as well as suggest how the use of textiles and their draping can assist in identifying an important third gender often neglected in ancient studies—that of the eunuch or physically emasculated male. A firm identification of such individuals and their social importance in Palmyrene society and funerary sculpture has never before been fully considered or discussed. Additionally, a possible subcategory of gendered cross-dressers related to the expanded roles of Semitic females as military combatants and matriarchal heads of Aramaean/Arab clans within Near Eastern cultures of the Eastern Roman provinces will also be addressed. Significantly, Palmyra's last ruler was female. This famous warrior queen, Zenobia/Bat Zabbai, challenged the patriarchal power of Rome. Zenobia, however, represented only one manifestation of an historic tradition of female tribal leaders indigenous to the Semitic Aramaean and Arab cultures of the ancient Near East as well as female combatants of Indo-Aryan Persia.<sup>2</sup> We must therefore ask, what did these queens and other female combatants wear into battle while on horseback or camelback as they confronted both indigenous and foreign foes? How were they as well as Near Eastern female heads of extended clans identified visually by costume or other attributes? The typical woman's long tunic indigenous to the ancient Near East could never have functioned efficiently or comfortably for many of these cross-gendered roles. These women are thus another prominent category for potential

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<sup>1</sup> See Malcolm Colledge, *The Art of Palmyra*, (London: Westview Press, 1976). See also Henri Seyrig, "Armes et costumes iraniens de Palmyre," *SYRIA* 18 (1937): 4-31. Also Bernard Goldman, "Graeco-Roman Dress in Syro-Mesopotamia," in Judith Lynn Sebasta and Larissa Bonfante, edit., *The World of Roman Costume*, (London: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001) 163-81.

<sup>2</sup> See for example W. Robertson Smith. *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966) 295-96. This is but one example noted of a very ancient custom in the Near East. One of the earliest Arab queens noted as a combatant against the Assyrians was Queen Iskallatu. One of the latest was Queen Mavia of the Sinai during the Byzantine Era.

textile cross-dressers, and their choice of attire an important aspect of study related to the visual cues chosen to emit their unique status within ancient Near Eastern societies.

From the outset, it must be understood that from the Roman perspective of the Late Republic, almost all “barbarians” of the Eastern Roman Provinces and those influenced in their adoption of Greek dress by the latent styles of Hellenization associated with previous Seleucid and Ptolemaic dominance of the region were considered by traditional Romans to be gendered “cross dressers.” Ethnocentric Roman literary texts are rife with criticisms of the “effeminate costume” associated with some Roman men who adopted either Greek or Near Eastern clothing styles. In Cicero’s *Second Speech Against Catiline* we read of Cicero’s disdain for such styles and their association in his mind with a perverted lifestyle unbefitting a male Roman magistrate or citizen.<sup>3</sup> While it can be historically demonstrated that much of Roman costume for both men and women was in fact influenced by earlier Greek and Etruscan precedents, this historic reality seems lost on the great Roman orator quoted above. The tone of Cicero’s invective against the abandonment by some Roman males of the culturally accepted Roman variations of Greek styles for public attire, indicates that a breach of these accepted dress codes brought accusations of immorality and cross-gendered sexual experimentation seen as not only morally inappropriate in the public forum but as civic threats to the Roman ideals of patriarchal order and appropriate concepts of both “maleness” and public and private male behavior. The evolution of these cultural attitudes is especially interesting to trace as the Roman Empire emerges from the confines of the Italian peninsula and spreads both East and West in the Imperial Age.

As developing Roman military and political interests penetrated into Greater Syria and confronted the Hellenized Semitic Levant and Parthian and Sassanian Persia, later Roman authors were also perplexed by the adoption of male military dress by some Near Eastern and Persian women as well as these females’ obvious combative presence in the battlefield alongside their male compatriots. These examples of “strange” Oriental cross-gendered behaviors at odds with patriarchal Rome caused both consternation and wonderment for Roman historians.<sup>4</sup> These puzzled observations by Roman writers indicate that for those Semitic and Persian communities of the Eastern Frontier active in the Silk Trade and exposed to a smorgasbord of Roman, Greek, Semitic, Persian, and Gandharan Indian textile and clothing styles, gendered cross-dressing was not an uncommon occurrence. Additionally, such accounts indicate that the choice of specific textile styles had potent indigenous cultural meaning for the sexes of these societies. This paper thus focuses on how the indigenous Palmyrenes of Syria utilized some aspects of

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<sup>3</sup> Cicero, *Second Speech Against Catiline*, 2.22. “These are the men you see with their carefully combed hair, dripping with oil, some beardless, others with shaggy beards, with long-sleeved and ankle-length *tunicas*, wearing *vela*, not *togas*. All the activity of their lives and all the efforts of their waking hours are devoted to banquets that last till dawn. In this herd you find all the gamblers, all the adulterers, all the filthy minded lechers. These boys, so dainty and effeminate have learnt not only to love and to be loved, not only to dance and sing, but also to brandish daggers and sow poison...How will they stand the frosts and snows of the Apennines? Perhaps they think that they will withstand the winter more easily because they have learned to dance *nudi* at banquets.”

<sup>4</sup> One of many examples is recorded in the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, 4.5.3 as quoted from Magie by Michael H. Dodgeon and Samuel N.C. Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars A.D. 226-363-A Documentary History*, (Routledge: London, 1994) 83-84.

gendered cross dressing to visually communicate their own socially and culturally accepted views of gender roles—views that often clashed demonstrably with the attitudes of their Roman conquerors and allies.

Over two hundred years of Hellenistic Seleucid and Ptolemaic influences in Greater Syria guaranteed that Greek styles of dress would remain a potent option for Palmyrene citizens even after Roman ascendancy in the region after the first century B.C. Togas and other easily recognizable Roman dress styles associated with Roman citizenship are rare for both males and females in private Palmyrene funerary sculpture. For most citizens of Palmyra a combination of indigenous Semitic costume styles (sewn in sleeves within a loosely fitted full length body tunic), long prevalent in the region and perfectly adapted to desert survival, embellished with outer garments often worn in a Greek fashion prevailed. Thus, the inner costume of most Palmyrene males and females began with the Semitic tunic (not the Greek *chiton* or *peplos*) over which either an *abba* (a long sleeved open cloak) or a long piece of material worn in the fashion of a Greek *himation* (or both) are commonly seen in funerary portraits. These over garments were useful in a climate that varied drastically in temperature fluctuations from the heat of the desert day to the cold of the desert night. Headdress styles for both men and women however consisted of predominantly Semitic styles, ranging from the Phoenician influenced *modius* or *sarcedotal* priestly hat for men, to indigenous clan and tribal headdress styles for most women consisting of a textile headscarf tied in the back of the head whose long tie ends were wound around the head to create a turban-like style (figure 1). Women then covered this turban style and upper body with a long piece of textile sometimes draped in Greek fashion or held in a popular *pudici* style symbolizing their chastity and virtue. This style was popular in Hellenized Asia Minor and often depicted in the sculptural products of the workshops at Aphrodisias with whom Palmyra carried on a lucrative trade in marble and limestone. Thus, this style's particular penetration to the Syrian Desert and the coasts of the Levant. There are only a few rare deviations from this pattern in female dress at Palmyra, with Roman hairstyles and dress being amongst the rarest in evidence within Palmyrene female portraits. This reticence to abandon a Semitic and Greek amalgam of costume styles as well as Greek and Aramaic as the dominant languages of choice, despite the domination of Rome, gives evidence for how fragile the Roman political gloss was in this region of the far-flung Empire.

Equally evident with that of Semitic and Greek eclectic dress combinations at Tadmor, especially with relation to Palmyrene males, was the popular adoption of Persian dress for funerary portraits. Previous modern scholars have noted the Palmyrene propensity to combine both Eastern Parthian/Sassanian Persian dress with Western Greek styles along with indigenous Semitic costuming to create elaborate and unique funerary ensembles possibly unmatched in beauty anywhere else the Eastern Roman Provinces.<sup>5</sup> While the visual presentation of textiles and costumes with relation to social status both in this world and the next was certainly an important Palmyrene paradigm, functionality of style with relation to the design of garments in a challenging desert environment was also an important consideration at Tadmor. Palmyra served not only as the center of a great caravan kingdom, but also as a client kingdom of Rome whose camel and horse corps

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<sup>5</sup> See sources noted in footnote 1.

were famous throughout the Roman Empire for their military accomplishments. Such desert adventures could not be accomplished in the Greek short *chiton*, *himation*, or Roman *toga* or metal *cuirass*. Palmyrene relief sculpture is rife with the glorified imagery of its citizenry where male riders have adopted the Parthian Persian tunic with loosely draped pants (*anaxarides*) and at times protective chaps called *jambieres* as well as Persian boots and a short riding cape (*chlamys*) or mantle (*himation* or *pallium*) as a more practical solution to their adventuresome needs in a desert climate. In this regard, the most visible difference between traditional Palmyrene styles for both genders and those of Italic Rome rests in the Roman adoption of Greek draping as the basic genesis for most costume design for both sexes, versus the Semitic/Persian preference for long or short tunics whose sleeves and shoulder seams were cut and sewn to fit the body. Such garments had long been indigenous to the Semitic groups of the ancient Near East and appear as visual ethnic markers in the Egyptian tomb paintings depicting Semitic/West Asian peoples as early as the Amarna Period. Additionally, the gendered roles of both Palmyrene males and females as public symbols of both political clan and tribal association as well as cultic importance with relation to the veneration of tribal deities, shrines, and rituals often influenced the traditional parameters of both male and female attire. Palmyrene males, however, were seemingly allowed more cross-cultural flexibility in the choice of portrait attire than Palmyrene females. This was due to the gendered roles of Palmyrene women as symbols of historic tribal and familial identity within both the public forum and the private spheres of the funerary tomb access and ancestral veneration.<sup>6</sup> The majority of Palmyrene women are thus more traditionally Semitic in their choice of funerary portrait attire. However, between these two poles there was also room in Palmyrene society for cross-dressing especially for those whose social and/or political roles placed them within the parameters of a different gendered paradigm.

Primary among such individuals was the eunuch or emasculated male. For untold millennia eunuchs played not only an important cultural role in Near Eastern and Persian societies, but also often were associated with special religious status. Indeed, some Eastern cults such as those of Cybele required the public self-castration of the male devotee as a prerequisite of admission to the highest levels of the cult. Significantly, the most ancient myths of the Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar (the earliest deity noted epigraphically as associated with Palmyra/Tadmor) also give a eunuch the role of savior/assistant in the great goddesses' quests in the Underworld—a quest whose success or failure was also tied to the survival of humankind. Whether biologically produced or castrated at an early age as young slaves, eunuchs often served as the most trusted advisors and guardians of the aristocratic women of a great house, estate, or palace. Castration could include the removal of either both the testicles and penis, only the testicles at a very early age, or the removal of testicles just after the onset of puberty. Each process was chosen to produce variations in physical musculature and appearance by the manipulation and/or destruction of the major male hormones and organs at various stages of human development depending on the preferences of the buyer or employer. Since eunuchs could produce no offspring of their own, eunuchs were the perfect protectors of the virtues of aristocratic women, ideally providing masculine strength

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<sup>6</sup> Cynthia Finlayson, "Veil, Turban, and Headpiece-Female Status and Funerary Portraiture at Palmyra, Syria," (PhD dissertation., University of Iowa, 1998).

without the supposed dangers of sexual intrigue. Some eunuchs were also prized as the trusted chamberlains of rulers, since they supposedly could have no vested interest in establishing their own dynastic offspring on a throne. Thus, many eunuchs reached high status as advisors and governmental administrators. At ancient Palmyra, Queen Zenobia herself is noted as having a staff of eunuchs.<sup>7</sup> As a widowed queen, eunuchs of an advanced age provided Zenobia a culturally acceptable entourage of advisors and guardians whose physical condition thus provided no taint of potential sexual scandal while at the same time protecting the queen's person and also providing her with valued administrative advice. Thus, knowing of the literary references of the existence of eunuchs in Palmyrene society, can we attempt to search for such individuals within Palmyrene funerary portraits. Certainly, their special status could have been signaled by cross-dressing if we could but discern what to look for as textile and costume-based clues.

A careful examination of all known Palmyrene funerary portraits reveals a possible example of a Palmyrene eunuch in a family portrait from the Tomb of Malku from the Southwest Necropolis at Palmyra (figure 1). Here a prominent aristocratic Palmyrene family is seen in the traditional funerary pose of the eternal symposium or sacred meal. The male patriarch of the family reclines in Parthia/Persian attire with the matriarch seated in a place of honor to his right. In between the couple are arranged individuals who at first glance appear to be their offspring, however, a closer examination of the third individual from the left side of the patriarch discloses a unique use of textile draping and costume within Palmyrene contexts. A cursory examination of this individual might give one the impression that the figure is female adorned with a Hellenistic-influenced "melon hairstyle," jewelry, and a full tunic despite the square and heavy nature of the facial features. One gesture however, which involves a symbol associated with drapery positioning, may indicate that this individual was actually a male eunuch. No mortal Palmyrene female is ever depicted exposing the top of her leg in a public or funerary portrait. Only a few Palmyrene goddesses including Hellenized versions of Nike and Allat were allowed such an attribute of public undress. In such cases legs up to the knees or the upper thigh on one leg were exposed to indicate Nike's flight and movement, or in the case of Allat, lower legs were exposed due to the wearing of male battle dress and the cuirass and tunic as the Allat's role as the Arab goddess of desert warfare. Despite the fact that mortal Palmyrene women are never seen exposing their legs, the individual noted above within the Malku family portrait purposively exposes the right knee by lifting the fold of the long tunic above the knee cap and accentuated that exposure for the viewer by a hand and finger gesture that purposively draws the viewer's eye to the revealed leg and knee (figure 2). The exposed leg thus possibly signals his altered male gender and role as a household eunuch, as such a pose was not appropriate for Palmyrene women. Unfortunately, the genealogical inscriptions from this family composition are damaged and unreadable, so we at present have no name associated with this individual. Knowing the possible meaning of this gesture in Palmyrene contexts however, we can examine forthcoming archaeological finds to attempt to test this theory.

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<sup>7</sup> See *SHA trig.tyr.* 30, 19-22. "At her banquets she used vessels of gold and jewels, and she even used those that had been Cleopatra's. As servants she had eunuchs of advanced age but very few maidens."





Figure 2 (left). Close-up of possible eunuch with exposed knee and leg with a raised garment hem. Hypogeum of Malku. Photo: C. Finlayson, 2003.

Figure 3 (right). Female funerary portrait from the Temple Tomb of Taai with Persian pants, c.AD 150, Southwest Necropolis, Palmyra. Damascus National Museum. Photo: C. Finlayson, 2003.

Another possible example of a eunuch has previously been noted by Malcolm Colledge and currently is in the holdings of the NY Carlsberg Glyptotek.<sup>8</sup> In this case the individual in question is dressed in a women's long tunic but does not wear a headdress. Significantly, the hair is long and free-flowing down the back of the shoulders. This hairstyle also appears on a Palmyrene portrait of a male slave (or possible eunuch) and woman also at the NY Glyptotek Museum.<sup>9</sup> These two portraits thus give us confusing visual signals. The only other time that Palmyrene women are seen with free-flowing hair is when they act as mourners for the dead. In this case they wear a distinctive costume that consists of a tight fitting garment that exposes the top of the chest in order to reveal self inflicted wounds created as part of a bloodletting ritual associated with mourning for the deceased. Since no other portraits of Palmyrene women in lavish attire and free-flowing hair are known to exist, but only the example of a male slave noted by inscription above in Hvidberg-Hansen's work, we might tentatively assume that the first individual noted by Colledge was a eunuch since this individual is not in the appropriate mourning attire for Palmyrene women. As previously mentioned, no other known Palmyrene female portrait has exposed loosened hair devoid of mourning attire. Very young Palmyrene women occasionally appeared bare headed, but in these cases the hair was tightly braided and coiffured in either the Hellenistic influenced melon hair style or in a style influenced by Roman Flavian precedents. In the case of the individual noted by Colledge however, we do have a partial genealogical inscription, but the question remains as to whether this inscription belongs to the individual in the portrait since the portrait is broken to the right and could have been part of a dual portrait rather than just a single

<sup>8</sup> Colledge, 72, 216, 266 and Plate 91. See also Finn Ove Hvidberg-Hansen, *The Palmyrene Inscriptions Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek* (Copenhagen: Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, 1998) 74-76.

<sup>9</sup> Hvidberg-Hansen, *The Palmyrene Inscriptions Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek*, 75-76.



figural presentation. Additionally, this inscription, due to its Semitic Palmyrene root constructions of consonants and no vowels, presents some problems of translation. It seemingly reads, “Image of Baththay (or Baththi) daughter of Yarhai, Alas!”<sup>10</sup> However, the consonant root stem of BTY that appears for this individual’s name could also be the male name, Bate, at Palmyra. The root stem of SLMT which precedes the name seems to be feminine, translated with the final “T” as meaning the “statue of a woman.” But the root stem of SLM would be the masculine version. It would thus be interesting to re-examine this portrait in person to determine if the the translation is correct or incorrect and/or if the portrait could have been a dual portrait and the inscription belonging to a missing individual rather than the image that is extant. Frustratingly, due to these problems, we cannot determine if the individual is a female or a eunuch in feminine dress. If the latter is true, we could have another cultural cue for the depiction of eunuchs which consists of elaborate female dress in the form of a long tunic and extensive jewelry plus long free-flowing hair associated in other male portraits with slave locks or possibly, a Hellenistic melon style headdress as in the Malku example (figure 1). In Colledge’s example, the richness of the textiles depicted as adornments for this funerary portrait may indicate this individual’s status in Palmyrene society as a gender marker.

As previously mentioned numerous Roman accounts describing both Queen Zenobia and other Near Eastern women note their role in the hunt for lions and in battle.<sup>11</sup> Specifically, Herodian notes:

The barbarians, it may be noted, do not have a paid army as the Romans do, nor do they maintain trained standing armies. Rather, all the available men, and sometimes the women too, mobilize at the king’s order. At the end of the war each man returns to his regular occupation, taking as his pay whatever falls to his lot from the general booty. They use the bow and the horse in war, as the Romans do, but the barbarians are reared with these from childhood, and live by hunting; they never lay aside their quivers or dismount from their horses, but employ them constantly for war and the chase.<sup>12</sup>

With relation to the manners of Zenobia we read in the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*

She lived in regal pomp. It was rather in the manner of the Persians that she received worship and in the manner of the Persian kings that she banqueted; but it was in the manner of a Roman emperor that she came forth to public assemblies, wearing a helmet and girt with a purple fillet, which had gems hanging from the lower edge, while its centre was fastened with the jewel called cochlis, used instead of the brooch worn by women, and her arms were frequently bare. Her face was dark and of a swarthy hue, her eyes were black and powerful beyond the usual wont, her spirit divinely great, and her beauty incredible. So white were her teeth that many thought that she had pearls in place of teeth. Her voice was clear and like that of a man. Her sternness, when necessity demanded, was that of tyrant, her clemency, when her sense of right called for it, that of a good emperor....She made use of a carriage, and rarely of a woman’s cach, but more often she rode a horse; it is said, moreover that frequently she walked with her

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<sup>10</sup> Hvidberg-Hansen, *The Palmyrene Inscriptions Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek*, 75-76.

<sup>11</sup> For women combatants in Near Eastern forces see the Roman writers Zonaras, Libanius, Herodian, and Julian to mention only a few examples.

<sup>12</sup> See Herodian VI, 5, 3-4, trans. E.C. Echols, *Herodian of Antioch’s History of the Roman Empire* (Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 1961).

foot-soldiers for three or four miles. She hunted with the eagerness of a Spaniard. She often drank with her generals, though at other times she refrained, and she drank too, with the Persians and the Armenians, but only for the purpose of getting the better of them.<sup>13</sup>

Ancient Semitic Aramaean and Arab tribal customs within Palmyra also seemingly retained the tradition of *mot'a* marriage in which a woman could select a male mate for a specified period of time in order to beget children to build up her clan or family, the children of such marriages being the property of the woman and not the man.<sup>14</sup> Such relationships made it possible for a woman to become the founding head of a clan or tribe. Even after their settlement at Palmyra, such desert nomadic traditions as *mot'a* marriage and the participation of women in battle to protect a tribe's survival persisted due to Palmyra's role as a client kingdom of Rome with the duty of protecting Rome's Eastern frontier against Parthia and Sassania as well as safeguarding the essential trade routes from Bedouin marauders. This role also ensured Palmyrene economic survival based on caravan trade. With so many demands on a relatively small population base, women seemingly retained the tribal prerogative to act like men both in the battlefield and within economic transactions.

It seems clear that for some of the women of Palmyra the above roles must have necessitated the donning of some types of male garb. Interestingly, given extant portraiture, there seem to have been two costume options for the cross-dressing woman of Tadmor. Interestingly both of these costumes combine non-indigenous costume pieces to visually cue the Palmyrene audience to these women's special status.

Relatively few Palmyrene women are depicted in a standing position in the later funerary sculpture of Palmyra. In the majority of familial portraits, the matriarch of a family is usually depicted seated on the right hand side of her husband, a Near Eastern place of honor, or only as a bust-length individual portrait. Significantly, of those few Palmyrene women who are depicted individually as standing sculptures after the first century A.D., a number of them wear loose male Persian style riding pants often embellished with jeweled or gathered anklets with a long central portion of their over-tunic gathered between their legs in a fashion that reveals their panted legs (figure 3). This differs from the usual female long dress-tunic that is not separated between the legs and is depicted with carefully rendered long pleats down the whole length of the lower body. Since the Persian pants are usually associated with male dress, we could postulate that they are worn by some women for the functional purposes of riding and/or the assumption of some cross-gendered roles within their family structure. Significantly, the Palmyrene version of the goddess of Victory at Palmyra also at times hosts such cross-gendered and cross-culturally influenced garb of Persian derivation. Thus, both the stance of these women and their cross-gendered attire might signal their special status in Palmyrene society.

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<sup>13</sup> *SHA trig.tyr.* 30, 13-18.

<sup>14</sup> For the custom in pre-Islamic Arabic see W Robertston Smith, 83, 88, 91, 94, 120, 127, 152, 167, 206, 213, 290. For Zenobia's possible practice of this custom see *SHA trig. tyr.* 30, 12 in Michael H. Dodgeon and Samuel N. C. Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars A.D. 226-363-A Documentary History*, 83.

The other option for the military female must have been similar to depictions of both male and female deities in Palmyra associated with war and protection. This dress consisted of an eclectic combination of Persian loose pants or tighter Roman-style leggings, the former sometimes also adorned with Persian chaps, a knee-length tunic, and/or a Hellenistic style military cuirass with cloak. Significantly for Palmyrene women these garments would have consisted of both cross-gendered and cross-cultural attributes. Additionally, the Palmyrene female Arab goddess of war, Allat, is often depicted with either cuirass body armor and/or the aegis of Athena (a Hellenizing attribute) worn over a short-sleeved tunic that exposes the upper arm. Significantly, in the quote noted above with relation to Zenobia, the author states that Zenobia's upper arms were often exposed, an unusual state of undress for women of the Semitic Near East. We must assume this allowed her a freer range of motion for both hunting and for battle.

In conclusion, we may potentially have some textile markers to look for with relation to the identification of eunuchs associated with; (1) the wearing of female attire, most often the female Semitic long tunic embellished with embroidery panels and/or extensive jewelry; (2) at times, long hair locks down the back also seen on male slaves whose status is verified by inscription; and, (3) when in female dress and in a standing position, the exposure of one leg above the knee by the gathering of the tunic hem above the knee cap and the assumption of a female hairstyle as in our example from the Hypogeum of Malku (figure 1). All of these aspects, however, are variations of indigenous Semitic textile costuming and hairstyles. Additionally, due to the specific problems of our current portrait examples we must await further archaeological evidence to verify these proposed theories of eunuch identification. Specifically, we need to find examples that have inscriptions that are less problematic than those discussed above in order to identify the actual sexual status of the individual.

The women of Palmyra, however, who seemingly cross-dressed to assume some aspects of male gendered roles in the protection of the clan, tribe, the Palmyrene trade empire, or for hunting and riding, or as female clan heads, apparently utilized many types of non-indigenous clothing styles to advertise their status. Specifically seen in funerary portraiture were Persian loose riding pants which cover the legs but provide for more freedom of movement than the indigenous Semitic long tunic, as well as at times the potential use of versions of the Hellenistic Greek military cuirass in battle which copies Palmyrene sculptural versions of the Arab goddess of battle, Allat. In many cases the long tunic was still worn over the riding pants, but drawn to the center of the body between the legs in funerary portraiture. We cannot at this time determine if a short male tunic was worn in actual battle or on the hunt for more freedom of movement, although accounts of Queen Zenobia indicate that a shorter sleeved tunic was worn with her battle dress which exposed her upper arms. Thus, we can propose that for Palmyrene women, foreign styles provided an acceptable textile repertoire for the exploration of cross-gendered roles while at the same time providing for an acceptable level of Semitic female modesty even when pursuing what would be traditionally be assumed to be male roles in the eyes of the Roman world. For Palmyrene women of this special status, foreign import textile styles and military garb seemingly provided an acceptable conduit of gendered cross-dressing and empowered them both on the battlefield and within the clan and family. Indeed, at Palmyra, we may postulate that women, indeed, did wear pants.

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